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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 004154

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STATE FOR DRL, NEA/RA, NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: UAEG SEEKS TO END UNCERTAIN STATUS OF STATELESS  
RESIDENTS

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHELE SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Sheikh Khalifa issued directives October 25 for federal ministries to seek a final end to the problem of the "bidoun" (stateless persons) in the UAE. The bidoun of the UAE generally fit two groups: Arabs (from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman), and non-Arabs (primarily from Iran and the Indian sub-continent). Human rights activists were surprised by the announcement, since no member of Emirate Human Rights Association (EHRA, the only recognized human rights organization in the UAE) had been contacted for comment, although it was widely known that the plight of the stateless was EHRA's central issue. UAE security concerns likely trump humanitarian goals, as the President's directive seeks a final conclusion of the issue (tightly coupled to identification and who the UAEG can trust with citizenship) rather than a benefits-oriented resolution. End summary.

¶2. (U) On October 25, the official Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported that President Sheikh Khalifa had issued directives for federal ministries to seek a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of the country's "bidoun," or stateless people. A committee, headed by Brigadier Abdul Aziz Maktoum Al-Shareefi, Director of the Protective Security Department in the Ministry of Interior, is reportedly finalizing a list of those eligible to be granted citizenship after proving that they meet certain criteria. The criteria are ostensibly simple and include proof of residency in the UAE prior to December 2, 1971 (date of UAE declaration of federation), no documentation of prior or current citizenship in another country, and no record of a felony conviction. Children of qualifying bidoun, even if born after December 2, 1971, gain derivative status if they meet the other criteria. (Note: "Citizenship" in the UAE can range from being issued a passport but not having full access to government services, to a passport and citizen ID number entitling the holder to the full-range of federal programs, services, and social security benefits. It is not clear what level of citizenship is being proposed for the bidoun, although basic services like school registration and medical care associated with UAE identity papers should be resolved at a minimum. End note.)

Background

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¶3. (SBU) The bidoun of the UAE generally fit two groups: Arabs (from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman), and non-Arabs (primarily from Iran and the Indian sub-continent). A large number of stateless people are second and third generation bidoun, whose parents came to the Emirates when the borders were relatively open prior to independence. UAE citizenship is only automatically transferred by a UAE citizen father (or by Presidential fiat) and therefore descendants of a

stateless man, even if married to a UAE national woman, may remain stateless in perpetuity. The English daily "Gulf News" reports that the exact number of bidoun is unknown but quotes unofficial estimates placing the total between 75,000 and 100,000; MoI contacts put the number of people likely to meet the government's definition of "stateless" between 10,000 and 30,000. EHRA offered PolOff an estimate of 30,000 when defining the bidoun problem in July.

¶4. (U) While the bidoun are not subject to deportation, they face discrimination in the labor market, have limited access to both education and medical care (which require officially issued identity documents), and are restricted in their movements since they have no passport. In 2005, a directive from the Ministry of ducation prohibited both public and private schols from accepting any student without "proper documentation" which includes a passport and valid visa or residency permit. (Note: The UAE is not party to the U.N. Convention on Status of Stateless Persons. End note.)

#### Human Rights Groups Not Involved

¶5. (C) In July, Abdual Ghaffar Hussain, EHRA Chairman, told PolOff that resolving the situation of the bidoun was a significant focus of the newly established human rights NGO. Dr. Mohamed Ghobash, EHRA Secretary, told PolOff that the announcement by Sheikh Khalifa came as a complete surprise since the EHRA had not been involved in any way. Ghobash expressed disappointment that the EHRA had not been consulted, since many in the organization had hoped that any committee formed to address this significant social concern would have an EHRA representative, thus demonstrating the UAEG's commitment towards addressing human rights issues openly.

¶6. (SBU) In March, 2006, Dr. Mohamed Al-Kamali, Director General of the Institute of Training and Judicial Studies,

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Ministry of Justice, stated that UAE law already addressed the issue of the bidoun, and had clear rules and conditions governing the process of granting UAE citizenship under the Naturalization Act, even without identification documents. If indeed UAE law already allows for a method to address the issue, Khalifa's decree may be a call for something other than a technical solution -- possibly more of an attempt to put an end to ambiguity by defining clearly who does and does not qualify. English daily "Khaleej Times" had reported MoI officials saying in March that "many (bidoun) claim that they are stateless people to get UAE citizenship by circumventing rules," and that, "most stateless persons are actually infiltrators that have conveniently lost their documentation."

¶7. (C) Comment: The announcement does not appear to call for a "solution" since one technically already exists, but for a "once and for all" conclusion to end the discussion. The fact that the joint committee is "finalizing a list of the stateless people who are entitled to UAE citizenship," and that the head of the committee is not a member of Naturalization and Residency Department but represents MoI's Protective Security Department, suggests the UAEG is not only struggling to identify who qualifies under naturalization criteria, but is also screening lists of stateless persons for security risks to identify "admissible" bidoun. This follows reports that the lists of "electors" for the upcoming Federal National Council elections were vetted by State Security, and returned to the rulers of each emirate for alternative nominations, demonstrating ongoing caution on the part of the UAEG regarding who it empowers. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed highlighted the need for such "screening" in an October 30 conversation with Under Secretary Karen Hughes (septel). End comment.

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